

Welcome!

The woods around you beckon. Come walk this self-guided trail and let nature reveal its treasures.

Start at the Turkey Ridge trailhead, located behind the picnic area, left of the Motts Run Nature Center. Follow the **yellow** tree “blazes” and hike **clockwise**, looking for 14 numbered posts which match this brochure. (First post is approx. 400’ up path on left). Enjoy your journey!

Allow 40 minutes to complete .8 mile loop

1 Eye Spy!

Look straight up the limbless trunk of this **Tulip Poplar** (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) and search for “eyes” looking back at you! These oval scars once held leafy limbs. The tallest species of hardwood tree in North America, these sun seekers use their energy to grow branches high in the canopy and usually shed or drop their lower ones.

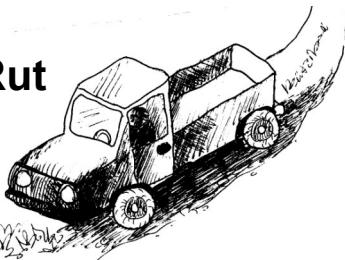
2 Fence-Eating Tree

Please do NOT touch the barbed wire— very brittle and breakable!

Look closely...it appears this large oak has “eaten” a **barbed-wire fence**...or has it? Years ago, a sapling grew next to a fence whose posts have long since rotted. As the tree grew a bit wider each year it expanded around the wire, “swallowing it up” so that rows of protruding metal are the only evidence left.

3 In a Rut

Listen and you can hear an old pickup truck rumbling along the **farm road** beneath your feet. Downhill from where you stand, the road crossed Motts Run creek, years before the reservoir was built. All around you, old dirt roads, eroding with time, crisscross the land, evidence of a bygone era.



4 Up, Up and Away

Search overhead for balls of leaves high in the forked trunks of trees. These are E. Gray Squirrel nests or **dreys**, used year-round as shelter and nurseries. Made of leafy branches clipped in summer before the leaves loosen, and lined with dry grass, shredded bark, moss and feathers, they are a cozy home. Squirrels may build several and move every few days to reduce fleas.

5 Elephant's Leg

Look all around...there are elephant legs everywhere! These gray-trunked trees are actually **American Beech** (*Fagus grandifolia*), whose smooth, gray bark, like the sand at the “beach” often invites unsightly and harmful carvings.

6 Nature's Supermarket

A large **White Oak** (*Quercus alba*) like this one can produce 5,000 acorns in a year! These little energy packets feed more wildlife than any other food source in the eastern forests. Wild turkey, deer and squirrels rely on this nutrition or “hard mast” in fall and early winter. As you walk, look for patches of disturbed leaves, where turkey have scratched the forest floor in search of acorns, beechnuts, insects and worms.

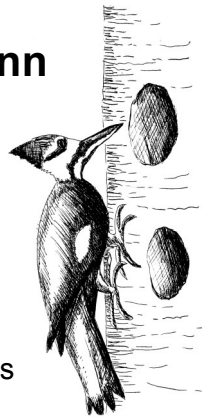


7 Seeing Green

Evergreen shrubs like this **Mountain Laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*) provide cover for early-nesting songbirds. Often forming dense thickets in wet soils or piney woods, laurel is covered in light pink flowers in mid-May. Held closed by tension, the round flowers spring open when touched by an insect, catapulting pollen onto the bee's body! Look closely...can you find any flower buds or dried seed heads?

8 Animal Inn

Dead standing trees like these are called “**snags**.” These “animal inns” are valuable to wildlife for feeding, perching and nesting. As the heartwood rots and decays, it becomes food for beetles, ants, and other insects. These in turn are fed on by woodpeckers who continue to hollow out the tree, creating habitat for wrens, bats, raccoons, squirrels, opossums.



9 Seasonal Stream

Nature has taken a shovel to the land at your feet. Rain, running off the surrounding hillsides has created this “**draw**” or small valley where you stand. Over time, water has carved this seasonal stream which only flows in wet periods. Look around for the evidence of moisture-loving ferns, fungi, and mosses.



10 Hilltop Rest

You've reached the top so take a break! **Stop and listen** as you quietly soak up Mother Nature. Can you hear the wind, a woodpecker, the "singing trees" as they rub against each other?

11 Fungus Among Us

Fungi growing on a tree-trunk is a sign that tree is dying. Here, **False Turkey Tail** (*Stereum ostrea*) has attached its root-like mycelium deep into the tree for nourishment. What else do you notice? Was this the former site of a treehouse, or maybe a deer stand...or perhaps a zip-line was once anchored here?!

12 Pine Grove

In ten years, most of these **Virginia Pines** (*Pinus virginiana*) will be dead or dying. Not from deadly insects or fire, but from time. These "pioneers" were the first trees to start growing on an old farm field sixty years ago. Now, at the peak of their lifespan, they shelter shade-loving oaks, maples and beech, which will soon rise above the pines.

13 The "Z" Tree

Did Harry Potter give this tree its lightning bolt shape? Was Zorro here to mark it with his "Z"? The answer is not nearly so mysterious! After losing its top, a side or lateral branch took over as the "**terminal leader**." When that limb was injured, another branch took the lead, highlighting a tree's never ending quest to reach the sun.

14 Soggy Soils

The leaves and roots underfoot are holding in water which has washed and seeped down from the hill you just descended. Here in the "**bottomland**", the acidic soil is dark and rich with decay, the perfect bed for Jack-in-the-pulpit, mayapple, ferns and other splendors of spring.



Jack-in-the-pulpit

Turkey Ridge Nature Trail

Located at Motts Run Reservoir
Spotsylvania Co., VA



Owned and operated by City of Fredericksburg
Dept. of Parks, Recreation and Public Facilities

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